

Cochituate Rail Trail Natick Update

Issue #6
Fall 2013

A community newsletter from the Natick Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee on the proposed Cochituate Rail Trail. Visit our website at www.natickma.gov/crt

Welcome to the 2013 Natick CRT Update!

The Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee is appointed by the Natick Board of Selectmen. Our 9 members include five citizens at large, along with representatives of the Selectmen, Community Development Department, Recreation and Parks Commission and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. Members serve for three-year terms. Meetings are public, and are posted in Town Hall and on the Town's web site. ■■■

What is the Cochituate Rail Trail?

The Cochituate Rail Trail is a proposed 4-mile path and linear park connecting Natick Center with Saxonville in Framingham, with a spur to the Natick Mall. The CRT would run over the former Saxonville Branch, abandoned as a freight line in 2006. The site of the last freight customer, a cold storage facility on Chrysler Road, is now the location of 400 units of high rise housing.

When it is completed, the CRT will provide access for walkers, bikers and strollers to Lake Cochituate and the State Park, several major roads, the MBTA station, several longstanding and new residential neighborhoods, Camp Arrowhead, the Amvets post, major employers and small businesses, the Natick Mall and the Saxonville neighborhood.

This long-term project will include land acquisition, design, construction and a maintenance plan. As with many rail trail projects, it is a lengthy process requiring coordination with many people and organizations, and will be underway for several years to come. We have continued to make good progress in making this long sought goal a reality.

Other completed or planned rail trail projects in the region include the Upper Charles Rail Trail, the Assabet River Rail Trail and the Bruce Freeman Trail (Lowell to Framingham). The CRT web page at www.natickma.gov/crt includes a map of current and planned rail trails across the state. ■■■

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Designing the CRT

In 2013, the Town hired BETA Group to do a "25% design" for the CRT. BETA, the town's on-call engineering firm, will develop the design for the entire project, including trail surface, at-grade and separated grade crossings, drainage, landscaping, historical features, connections to nearby recreational areas, amenities and other elements.

The CRT Advisory Committee will work closely with BETA. There will be public meetings to share the proposed design and get public input. The design is also being done in close consultation with MassDOT, and is a necessary step to qualify the CRT for state/federal construction funding.

The 25% design will incorporate key issues and many MassDOT requirements, including:

- Creating a safe crossing at Route 30, in coordination with future improvements to the nearby intersection of 30 and Speen Street.
- Working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation so the CRT has a well-designed connection to Lake Cochituate State Park.
- Modifying the Route 9 bridge to provide adequate clearance for current design standards, and reviewing other structures along the CRT.
- Making connections to Natick Center and the MBTA commuter station; this station is the subject of a separate feasibility study to consider accessibility, CRT connections and improved access to the Regional Transit Authority service.

MassDOT has recently funded drainage upgrades at the Natick Center MBTA station, which required access over the lower section of the CSX branch to position equipment. This has provided a gravel road that will someday support part of the CRT. ■■■

In addition, a MassWorks infrastructure grant for improvements to Kansas Street from North Main to the Natick Soldier Systems Center will fund a redesign of the Kansas Street intersection to accommodate the future CRT, while mitigation funds for a housing development at the former Natick Paperboard site will fund a redesign of the Lake Street/Washington Ave/North Main intersection to ensure a safe CRT crossing. ■■■

CSX negotiations and CRT access

CSX Transportation is the owner of the Right of Way (ROW). The Town is negotiating with CSX and has completed a jointly funded appraisal for the land. Negotiation is a lengthy process that may take a year or more to conclude. The trail design must be mostly complete before the state will approve the land purchase. State approval is needed to qualify the project for state construction funding.

The Town's Conservation Fund (used for buying open space) is one potential funding source, and we will pursue other sources.

The CSX ROW in Natick is private property; the Town of Natick does not have authority to permit access by individuals on the property. CSX pays property taxes on the land they own in Natick.

The Town has installed barriers to prevent motorized vehicles and trash disposal. If you observe dumping or other illegal activity on the ROW, please report it to the Natick Police. ■■■

Framingham CRT news

The Framingham section of the CRT is nearing completion and is scheduled to open in 2014. This 1.5 mile section extends from School Street in Saxonville to Route 30 at the Natick border.

Framingham's section is also being used for a sewer project, which is funding part of the cost of paving and other improvements. The balance is primarily funded by the state. The Framingham section was owned by the former Turnpike Authority and the MBTA, so they did not need to negotiate with CSX.

The web site www.crtrail.org has more information about the Framingham section of the CRT. ■■■

Survey and Wetlands work

In 2012/2013, BETA and its subcontractors completed a topographic survey and wetlands delineation. The survey will be incorporated into the design phase; this work identified wetlands near the CRT, which will also be considered as part of the design process. The Natick Conservation Commission oversaw this work and received the filing for the wetlands review. ■■■

Natick Town Meeting actions

Natick Town Meeting and other town committees have consistently supported development of the CRT project. Between 2006 and 2011, Town Meeting approved the transfer of \$500,000 in mitigation funds from General Growth to be expended under the direction of the Selectmen and the Conservation Commission.

These funds may now be expended until January 2018, and to date have funded design, appraisal, survey, environmental and consulting services, title research and security improvements to help keep the property and abutters safe from dumping and trespassing. The Town has committed approximately \$400,000 of these funds to date. No taxpayer funds have been spent on the CRT. ■■■

Contact the CRT Advisory Committee

The CRT Advisory Committee holds public meetings about once a month or as work requires. Visit www.natickma.gov/crt for more information, or email crt@natickma.org, or call the Selectmen's office at (508) 647-6410.

The CRT Advisory Committee web page includes

- CRT reports
- Maps
- Frequently Asked Questions & Answers
- Meeting minutes
- Links to other projects and resources
- Committee directory
- Contact information

Please contact the CRT committee with any questions. Your participation is welcome! ■■■
